DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 389 821 UD 030 740

AUTHOR Statzner, Elsa L.
TITLE A Teacher's Construction of Success among Non-Elite Children in an Heterogenous Urban Setting.
PUB DATE Apr 95
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, April 18-22, 1995).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; Constructivism (Learning); Cultural Awareness; Educational Practices; Elementary School Students; Elementary School Teachers; Grade 3; Heterogeneous Grouping; *Minority Groups; Primary Education; Second Language Instruction; Spanish; *Student Motivation; *Teacher Effectiveness; *Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS *Elites; *Freire (Paulo); Minnesota

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted in a middle to upper class neighborhood in a Minnesota city to determine the practices that the Spanish teacher used to encourage full student participation and to consider whether the Freirian view of education can furnish an adequate framework for understanding this teacher's practices. Of the school's more than 500 students, about 56% were minority, and many were of lower socioeconomic status. All materials used in the Spanish classes, which were attended by all children for 1 hour each week, were prepared by the teacher herself. During the 1990-91 school year, all six second-third grade Spanish classes (176 children) had been observed. The ideas of P. Freire provided a framework and methodology that did not bias the data through preconceptions. The teacher's teaching practices created interdependence, cooperation, and a new classroom culture. Games were the medium she used to socialize the children out of endemic school failure and to make learning dynamic. A generative theme was used as a springboard to social awareness and as a tool to lead students toward mutual respect and tolerance. Participation by elite and non-elite students required tailoring learning opportunities to the students' individual needs. (Contains 22 references.) (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 389 821

American Educational Research Association
San Francisco, CA
April 20, 1995

A TEACHER'S CONSTRUCTION OF SUCCESS AMONG NON-ELITE CHILDREN IN AN HETEROGENEOUS URBAN SETTING

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

E L. Statzner

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC).

Poster presented by
ELSA L. STATZNER (U MN)
1209-A Central St.
Evanston, IL 60201
Phone: 708-733-7248
Fax: Statzner-Ruggero 708-491-2523
E-mail: MRuggero@nwu.edu

UD030740

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

INTRODUCTION

This study responds to the need for redirecting social science research from the often hopeless study of educational failure to the heartening exploration of new and creative ways of meeting the needs of non-elite students (Ernst and Statzner, 1994), and tries to illuminate "when, and in what ways...learning settings make a difference" (Wolcott, 1987:40).

A major objective of this investigation was to discover "meanings and relationships," which the Spindlers remind us is at the heart of all ethnographic work (1987:156). For data collection participant observation was the mode selected because it serves to "explain [and] to describe reality in words....It is related to hermeneutics in which peoples' acts are texts that can be understood by critically reading them" (Bernard, 1988:22). In addition, participant observation is a required tool if one hopes to, "understand the meaning of the observations...formulate sensible questions in the native language, [and] describe processes" (Bernard 1988:150-2).

SITE OF THE STUDY: *"WHITE HERO"* ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Location: Middle/upper class Caucasian neighborhood, including a busy business area, in a city in Minnesota.

Student population: 500 plus students, even male/female distribution, 56% minority students. Ethnic groups in order of representation: Caucasian, African American, Latino, Asian, Native American and "Others." Mix of children from low-and middle-income families. Most students, especially the low SES students, were bussed to the school.

Staff: 18 Caucasian classroom teachers. Three Caucasian specialists, including the Spanish specialist, two African American specialists (one male, phy. ed.; and one female, music, teachers).

Parents active in the school: Middle-class parents, mostly Caucasian. Exception: The yearly music festival well attended by minority parents.

SEÑORA ANDERSON AND THE SPANISH PROGRAM AT *"WHITE HERO"* ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Program organization: All children, K-6, had one-hour per week of Spanish, during their classroom teacher's preparatory hour.

Physical Setting: A large, well lighted, carpeted classroom with mobile student work tables.

Staff: *Señora* Anderson, Caucasian, a certified elementary/ESL teacher fluent in Spanish. Over five years teaching experience. Had traveled in Mexico and Spain. Considered by minority parents and other foreign language teachers dynamic and effective.

Curriculum organization: No administrative guidelines. All materials used for Spanish classes in grades K-6 were prepared by *Señora* Anderson herself.

METHODOLOGY

Researcher roles: Participant observer and interviewer.

Field Methods (tools and techniques):

Field notes.

Recording (audio and videotapes).

Videorecording of 52 hour-long Spanish lessons.

Interviews (formal and informal).

General Observations: *"White Hero"* school and district memos and guidelines. Selected school events, neighborhood of school, low SES neighborhoods of students at the school, Spanish classes, Spanish teacher's home, daily schedule, and teaching materials.

Focused Observations: 2/3 graders in Spanish, Music, Phy. Ed., Art, and Library/Media preparatory time classes. Homerooms, lunchroom, playground and hallways. Two low SES minority homes, 2/3 grade Spanish students' work samples. Spanish teacher 2/3 grade lesson plans.

DATA

Period of Study: October 1988 through May 1992. Follow-up conversations with *Señora* Anderson, 1993-94.

Macro Analysis: 1988-1991. Two split 2/3 grade Spanish classes and two French classes, comparable program, age group, and school. The French teacher returned to a regular classroom the following year. During 1989-1990 collaborative projects with the Spanish teacher in split 2/3 grade classes were continued. Also presentation and publication of the data of the pilot study (Statzner, Winter 1989-90). Main study 1990-91: All six 2/3 grade Spanish classes, 176 children (49% Caucasian, 34% African American, and 17% Others). Plus the analysis of 52 hour-long videorecording of the Spanish lessons (Feb.-May 1991).

Micro Analysis: 12 hour-long videotaped Spanish lessons (two lessons for each one of the six classes). February to May 1991.

QUESTIONS

1. What practices did *Señora* Anderson, the preparatory time Spanish specialist, utilize to encourage full student participation?

2. Can the Freirian view of education furnish an adequate framework for understanding what this teacher did?

DISCUSSION

Freire's notions provided a framework and a methodology that did not bias the data on the children through the use of negative preconceptions and labels. On the contrary, it helped focus on the wider picture with an empathetic eye in the truest anthropological tradition.

Señora Anderson's teaching process created interdependence, cooperation and a new classroom culture (Woods 1990, Echeverriarza 1992), and took advantage of the fact that her classroom was sheltered from the society's most negative aspects (Shor and Freire, 1987).

The games were the medium *Señora* Anderson used to socialize the eight and nine-year-old children out of endemic school failure. This approach made learning dynamic, and her pedagogy matched Freire's notion of a enjoyable learning environment in which cognitive and affective domains go hand in hand.

Señora Anderson, through the use of a global unit as the year's theme, made use of a "generative theme" as a springboard to social awareness.[1] In addition, within the limited time at her disposal, she consciously led students toward a path of mutual respect and tolerance --which are the foundations of a pluralistic society, according to Freire (c.f., Echeverriarza 1992, Ladson-Billings 1994, and Nieto 1992).

[1] For the use of "generative themes" in regular elementary classrooms see M. Freire (1983), and Torres (1990).

CONCLUSIONS

1. ***The students' participation in the Spanish program by elite and non-elite children entailed acquiring social and participatory skills in advance of acquiring academic knowledge. Effective learning required opportunities for the students to experience public recognition of their achievement. Such opportunities had to be tailored to the students' individual needs.***

The mastery of integrative and participatory skills was essential before academic learning took place and breakdowns in those skills (for various reasons) impeded learning. Freire has always maintained that learning about the world is a pre-requisite to the reading of words. *Señora* Anderson was helping children read the world of schooling before their "reading" of the academic subject.

2. ***Factors other than teaching methodology, such as the students' and the teacher's backgrounds as well as a realistic evaluation of the teaching environment must be considered when assessing an instructional program.***

The social dimension of learning necessitates the utilization of multiple pedagogies (Tikunoff 1986, and Shor and Freire 1987). *Señora* Anderson's pedagogy was constituted by an eclectic combination of methodologies suited to her students and teaching environment.

I agree with Freire that "pedagogies" cannot be blindly copied from one setting to another; there are no blue prints to successful teaching. However, there exist principled approaches to the analysis of educational experiences that can inform researchers and practitioners. Freirian notions clarify them by stressing the economic interconnections between the First and Third Worlds, the relevance of educators' deeply-held beliefs to their practice, and the importance of analyzing the working environment, in addition to centering the pedagogical efforts around students' needs.

3. ***A European American teacher can be effective in fostering the academic success of non-elite children, including students with different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds from her own.***

Señora Anderson, in spite of being grounded in an European American middle-class culture could relate well to children from economic, cultural and social backgrounds different from her own. This is in accordance with Trueba's notion that a good teacher serves as a "cultural broker" (1989), as well as G. and L. Spindler's idea of teachers as agents practicing "cultural therapy" in their classrooms (Trueba, 1994).

However, while *Señora* Anderson provided an effective academic role model she could not make up for the school's lack of cultural models for the students. In a school where over 50% of the children were non-European American, there was a glaring lack of diversity among staff and administrators who appeared like a white sea in a brown ocean.

4. ***Preparatory-time teaching in a heterogeneous school setting (socioeconomically and culturally diverse) is a very difficult teaching mode that cannot flourish in the absence of collegial and administrative support.***

The difficulty of teaching in programs with limited student-engagement time, requires evaluators to maintain a holistic focus, emphasizing the possibilities and advantages of exposing children to a variety of academic and life skills (c.f., Rosenbusch, 1992). This is important because, in spite of all the problems associated with preparatory-time teaching that undoubtedly curtailed the teaching of the Spanish language, *Señora* Anderson was able to focus her program on multicultural skills (including Spanish linguistics) that all children, elite and non-elite alike, need in a pluralistic society such as the US.

The frustrations associated with preparatory-time teaching derive not only from constraints intrinsic to the limited contact time with the students, but also from negative and/or erroneous views about prep-time teaching held by colleagues and administrators. Obviously, ignoring these pressures only aggravates the situation and condemns prep-time teachers and their students to repeated confusion and failure.

REFERENCES

Bernard, R. H. (1988). Research methods in cultural anthropology. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Campbell, A. E. (1992). Once the door is closed: An ethnographic description of one content-based English language program as four teachers implemented it. Doctoral dissertation, University of Florida. Gainesville: FL.

Chamot, A., & O'Malley, J. M. (1992). The cognitive academic language learning approach: A bridge to the mainstream. In P. Richard-Amato & M. Snow (Eds.), The multicultural classroom: Readings for content area teachers (pp. 39-57). NY: Longman.

Echeverriarza, M. P. (1992). Choosing equality: An analysis of the social roles of the teacher in an ethnically diverse classroom. Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley: CA.

Ernst, G. , & Statzner, E. L. (1994). Alternative Visions of Schooling: An Introduction. In G. Ernst, E. Statzner & H. T. Trueba (Eds.), Alternative visions of schooling: Success stories in minority settings [Special issue]. Anthropology & Education Quarterly 25(3), 200-207.

Freire, M. (1983). A paixao de conhecer o mondo (A passion for knowing the world). Brazil: Paz e Terra.

Freire, P. (1994). Pedagogy of hope. NY: Continuum Publishing Company.

Ladson-Billings, G (1994). The dream keepers: Successful teachers of African American children. SF, CA: Jossey Bass.

Maher, F. A., & Thompson Tetreault, M. K. (1994). The feminist classroom. NY: Basic Books.

Nieto, S. (1992). Affirming diversity. The sociopolitical context of multicultural education. NY: Longman.

Rosenbusch, M. H. (1992). Is knowledge of cultural diversity enough? Global education in the elementary school foreign language program. Foreign Language Annals. 25(2), 129-137.

Shor, I., & Freire, P. (1987). A pedagogy for liberation. Dialogues on transforming education. NY: Bergin & Garvey.

Spindler, G. D., & Spindler, L. (1987). Ethnography: An anthropological view. In G. D.. Spindler (Ed.), Education and cultural process (pp. 151-156). Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland.

Statzner, E. L. (1989-1990, Winter). How much foreign language do children hear in nonintensive programs? FLESNews National Network for Early Language Learning 3(2), 6,9, & 10.

Statzner, E. L. (1994). And Marvin raised his hand: Practices that encourage children's classroom participation. In G. Ernst, E. Statzner & H. T. Trueba (Eds.), Alternative visions of schooling: Success stories in minority settings [Special issue] Anthropology and Education Quarterly. 25(3), 285-297.

Statzner, E. L. (1995, January). *Señora* Anderson's Teaching: A Case Study of a foreign language exploratory program in six multiethnic elementary classrooms. Doctoral dissertation. University of Minnesota. Minneapolis: MN.

Tikunoff, W. J. (1986). Developing student functional proficiency: A teacher's casebook. Part I (Teacher training monograph No.2). Teacher training project for bilingual and English teachers to speakers of other languages. Gainesville: FL.

Torres, C. (1990, November). Literacy training: A comparison of mainstream and participatory models. Paper presented at the 89th annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association. New Orleans: LA.

Trueba, H. (1989). Raising silent voices: Educating the linguistic minorities for the 21st century. NY: Harper and Row.

Trueba, H. (1994). Reflections on alternative visions of schooling. In G. Ernst E. Statzner & H. T. Trueba (Eds.) Alternative visions of schooling: Success stories in minority settings [Special issue], Anthropology and Education Quarterly. 25(3), 376-393.

Wolcott, H. F. (1987). The anthropology of learning. In G. D.. Spindler (Ed.), Education and cultural process (pp. 26-52). Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland.

Woods, P. (1990). Teacher skills and strategies. London: Falmer.